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JEWISH LITERATURE
Identity and Imagination

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NEIGHBORS: *The World Next Door*

Five Wednesdays, 6:30-8:00 p.m. (Starts Sept. 17)

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Book Titles and Summaries on Reverse (page 2)

Led by Prof. June Cummins, SDSU

Registration for the free series:

Kristen Lowrey (858) 694-2416; Kristen.Lowrey@sdcounty.ca.gov



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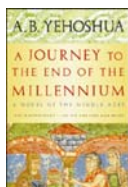


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NEIGHBORS: *The World Next Door*

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Wed, Sept. 17, 2008, 6:30-8:00 p.m. - Journey to the End of the Millennium (A. B. Yehoshua)



In the waning months of the year 999, Ben Attar, a wealthy Jew from Tangiers, sets sails for Paris. Armed with his two wives, his Muslim trading partner, and an Andalusian Rabbi, Ben Attar undertakes the expedition to salvage his relationship with his beloved nephew Abulafia. The estranged young man has settled in Paris with his bride, a cunning woman from a family of renowned Jewish scholars in Ashkenaz. Her moral repulsion for Ben Attar's bigamy—common in his world, unheard of in hers—has alienated Abulafia from Ben Attar.

In a compelling narrative rich with the sights and smells of the Mediterranean and Medieval Europe, Yehoshua powerfully dramatizes this intellectual and religious showdown between northern and southern Jews, one full of moral decrees, human desire, and heartbreak.

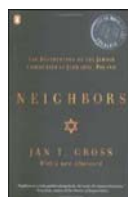
Wed., Oct. 29, 2008, 6:30-8:00 p.m. - Red Cavalry (Isaac Babel)



In 1920, Isaac Babel rode with the Red Cavalry into Eastern Poland as part of Russia's first attempt to spread the glory of Communism throughout Europe. These brief, trenchant short stories, drawn from Babel's observations of that disastrous campaign, are marked by a cool detachment and gift for the arresting phrase: "The orange sun is rolling across the sky like a severed head."

In Babel's wartime world, life continues, uneasily but inexorably: whether it's Lyutov, the young Jewish journalist who cloaks his identity to blend in with the Cossacks, or the pregnant Jewish woman who keeps her father's mangled corpse in her sleeping quarters, hidden under a blanket. ("I want you to tell me where one could find another father like my father in all the world!" she says.) Babel's unsentimental stories remain haunting and strikingly relevant, nearly ninety years after their creation.

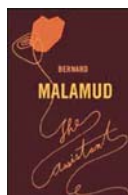
Wed., Nov. 12, 2008, 6:30-8:00 p.m. - Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland (Jan T. Gross)



"Until the outbreak of the war," writes Jan Gross, "Jedwabne was a quiet town, and Jewish lives there differed little from those of their fellows elsewhere in Poland." Then, on a summer evening in 1941, just weeks after Germany invaded the Soviet Union, Polish residents took up axes, clubs, and torches and massacred all but seven of the town's 1,600 Jews.

The perpetrators, who were brought to trial in 1949, never received official blame for the massacre, which instead went to the Nazis.

Piecing together eyewitness testimony and trial records with a deft historical imagination, Gross details the "potent, devilish mixture" that led Poles to turn on their Jewish neighbors. Originally published in Poland in 2000, the book sparked a national controversy and led to a public reconsideration of the Polish role in the Holocaust.

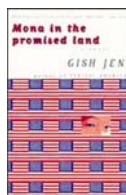


Wed., Dec. 17, 2008, 6:30-8:00 p.m. - The Assistant (Bernard Malamud)

Set in a failing Brooklyn grocery, Malamud's 1957 novel follows shop owner Morris Bober as his lightless existence is touched and confused by hardworking Frank Alpine, an "Italyener" he doesn't so much hire as inherit. Over the course of Alpine's short tenure, he steals from Bober, falls in love with his charmless daughter, and converts to Judaism.

Malamud negotiates his bleak subject without sentimentality. Like many of Malamud's stories, *The Assistant* poignantly (and perfectly) captures the specific struggles of immigrants in language both plain and poetic.

Wed., Jan. 28, 2009, 6:30-8:00 p.m. - Mona in the Promised Land (Gish Jen)



In this rollicking coming-of-age tale, Mona Chang's Chinese immigrant parents move their family to Westchester for its superior schools and majestic landscaping, only to find that their daughter develops a worrisome interest in the religion of her new friends. "Pretty soon Mona's tagged along to so many temple car washes and food drives...that she's been named official mascot of the Temple Youth Group."

Jen's fast-paced novel tracks Mona as she discovers herself and her place in the world: She decides to convert, crosses racial lines by becoming friends with the workers in her parent's pancake house, and falls in love with a boy from the local synagogue who lives in a tepee in his parent's backyard. With a sly eye, Jen mines the battlefields of adolescence and assimilation to produce a novel that is as charming as it is relevant.

Registration contact: Kristen Lowrey (858) 694-2416;
Kristen.Lowrey@sdcounty.ca.gov (Include name, address, phone, email address)

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